# University Magazine

March 2001

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## A DANCER'S PATH

STUDENT CHOREOGRAPHY GETS NATIONAL ATTENTION

## HIP HOP DANCE

A DANCE TROUPE ON CAMPUS FINDS A BREAK BEAT

## THEATER THEN AND NOW

THEATER DEPARTMENT IN FIFTH DECADE OF CHANGE

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**From the editor...**

A number of years ago (more than I am willing to admit) my mother took me to see the first national touring production of *Cats,* by Andrew Lloyd Webber, for my birthday. We parked on a small side street in downtown San Francisco and walked to the front of the Golden Gate Theatre, a spectacle of early 20th-century architecture with a large marquee that lit the street. A doorman took our tickets and directed us to our seats in the orchestra pit, a prized spot my mother had curiously managed to get.

When the show began, I sat mesmerized by what was before me. It captivated me with a kind of energy and creativity I had not experienced before.



The music was fresh and in my face. The dancing was sexy and perfectly timed. And the costumes, oh, the costumes.

That night was an exciting and unforgettable introduction to the world of Broadway, one that molded my tastes for music and theater. Since then, I have walked under numerous marquees in many locations to see acclaimed productions big and small. My mood always brightens as I enter the lobby and hear the musicians warming up inside.

I am a big fan of the theater. I live for musicals and plays with musicians and dancers that hold my attention to a flat space they fill with their talent and imagination. Fortunately, I live in Southern California where theater is a cultural aspect. The Music Center in downtown Los Angeles sits as a centerpiece to a large establishment of theaters and concert halls that cover the Southland.

And Cal State Long Beach is a part of that. Our theater and dance departments hold a position of prominence in the local community. Our plays, musicals and dance concerts add to the quality of our culture. And our surrounding community boasts a number of small and large theaters that offer an eclectic mix of live entertainment, complementing what is happening at the university.

This issue of University Magazine takes a look at the history of our theater department and a glance at some of the interesting groups making themselves known on campus.

I feel privileged to study at a school that places so much value on the arts. Though I am only a fan of theater, I feel connected to it. A musical background helps me appreciate it, and a passion for live performance keeps me buying tickets. I look forward to the next show on my calendar with the excitement I once felt about having a birthday, one in which my mother was sure to give me some special gift.

John Caldwell
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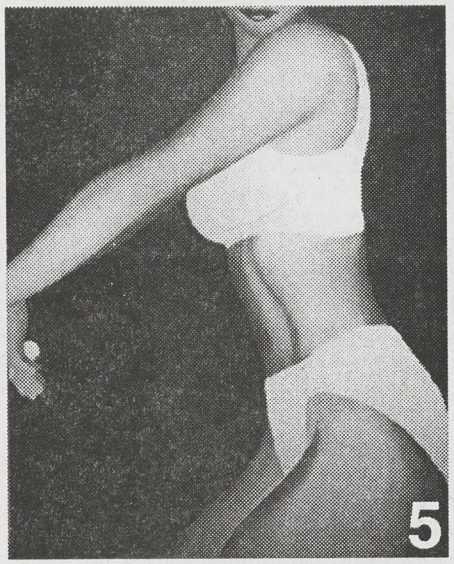


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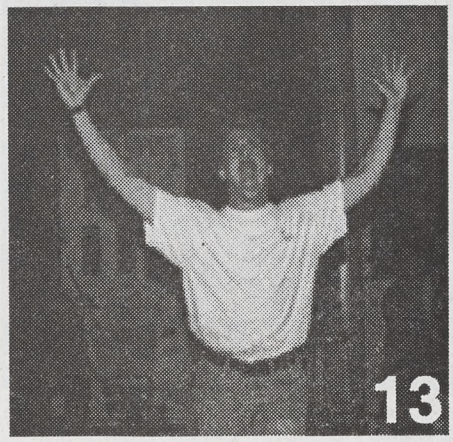
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An improv theater group at Cal State Long Beach is making the audience a part of the show.

# University Character



Photos by Caroline Limuti

Daedalus and Icarus by Glen Miller appears on the side of Engineering Building 2.

## Mysterious sculpture brings campus to life

Everywhere one looks while walking around the Cal State Long Beach campus, some type of sculpture is probably within view. In 1965, works by 10 professional artists were installed on campus grounds. An additional 10 have been added during the past 25 years and nine sculptures by CSULB students, the oldest of which dates to 1964, make the current total 29.

Many of the mysterious and oddly shaped works evoke a sense of wonderment. One such piece incorporates two skeletal-like men hanging on the west stairwell wall of Engineering Building 2. The work, created by student artist Glen Miller in 1966, is actually a depiction of a famous Greek myth. Daedalus and Icarus were part of Miller's master's thesis and was specifically designed for the engineering building. Miller wanted to use the famous falling image of Icarus to symbolize the use of science to provide aircraft capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

"He intentionally thought of dealing with the issue of flying," said Liz Harvey, curator of education for the University Art Museum. "It was a reference to engineers."

The Graduate Committee suggested adding Icarus' father, Daedalus, a mythical Greek craftsman and inventor, to the work. In the story of *Daedalus and Icarus,* Daedalus fashions wings out of wax for he and his son to escape a labyrinth in which King Minos had imprisoned them. Icarus flies too close to the sun and falls to his death while Daedalus escapes to Sicily. The two figures in Miller's piece symbolize engineering's ability to construct and to create that which can destroy.

The University Art Museum's website offers an online tour of the CSULB Outdoor Sculpture Collection at www.csulb.edu/~uam. The Art Museum also offers walking tours of the sculptures on campus. For more information, call (562) 985-5761.

*– John Caldwell*

## Green fences have students seeing red

The name of the game is survival of the fittest, as Cal State Long Beach students must adapt to the shape-shifting campus. Green fences surrounding construction on the Fine Arts Buildings have been up since January 2000, but with the addition of the fences on Hardfact Hill this past January it seems as though students have been kicked to the curb. The sidewalk near East Campus Drive that led up the hill is no longer accessible.

"It's like my main artery being cut from me," says senior art major Brian Ahumada. He walks on the street to save time even though cars driving by make it dangerous.

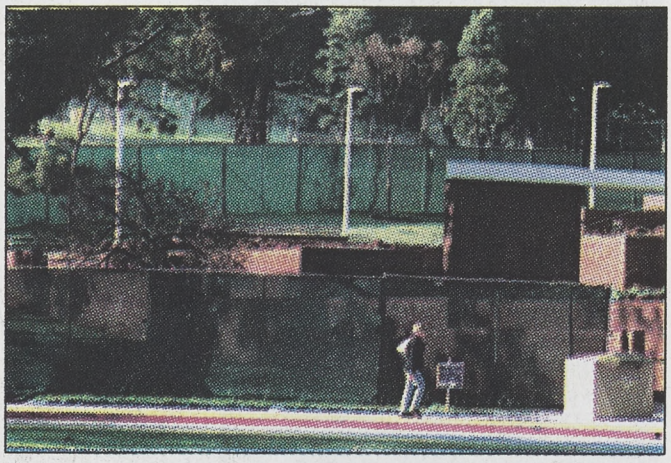
The sidewalk will be reconstructed but it will be two years before anyone can walk on it, says Dale Hartmann, university construction manager. In the meantime, students should utilize an alternate route rather than walking on the street, he says.

"It's a safety issue," Hartmann says. "We don't want anyone to get run over."

The fences have not affected junior Dylan Kline's ability to get around campus. He has a different problem.

"The only thing the fences take away from me is access to the vending machines by the UTC [University Telecommunications Center]," the film and electronic arts major says. "During communications class I end up starving to death."

*- Jennifer Umaña*



Green fences surrounding construction zones dominate the landscape at CSULB.

## A small plot of land is preserved as point of creation



Activists and Indian tribes fought to preserve this small plot of land adjacent to CSULB as a sacred site.

Photos by Caroline Limuti

Nestled behind the asphalt of Lot G is a small plot of land that, with a passing glance, would appear as nothing more than a few trees and patches of overgrown grass. Yet the First People of Southern California believe this land, and the land surrounding it, was the center of creation.

The land on which Cal State Long Beach stands was once the Indian village Puvungna, encompassing an area extending about 500 acres on and around campus, according to Eugene Ruyle, a professor of anthropology at CSULB and longtime supporter of the Puvungna struggle.

"The campus agreed to preserve the land in the late '70s, but reneged on its promise in the early '90s, under then-President McCray's rush to privatize the campus," Ruyle says.

The impending development was halted after Indians pitched tents and conducted a prayer vigil to protect the site, drawing the attention of the American Civil Liberties Union.

According to information released by Ruyle, the ACLU filed a lawsuit against the Cal State University, obtaining a preliminary injunction that "blocked any digging for archaeology or development purposes, and ordered that Native Americans be granted access to the land for spiritual purposes."

Since then, CSULB President Robert Maxson has abandoned any plans for commercial development and pledged to preserve the land as open space as long as he is in office, according to Ruyle.

Joined by local community members, several Indian tribes have been in the fight for preservation and appreciation of the Puvungna site.

Mike Soultanian, a staff member for the College of the Arts, is a former CSULB dorm resident who lived adjacent to the Puvungna grounds. On March 23, 1999, he built a swing that has since been updated and serves as a significant addition for people who come from all over Southern California.

"It's an interesting place because you go out there and you sit on the swing and you kind of forget everything around you," Soultanian says. "Granted, it's only a little bit of land but it means so much to a lot of people. That little swing has now become part of a lot of people's lives."

*- Ryan May*



The land on which Cal State Long Beach sits was once an Indian village.

## Our own iconic structure has no real secrets



Who built the pyramids and why? That mystery continues to intrigue and plague scholars and scientists worldwide. In Mexico, pyramids are thought to have been built in alignment with the moon and sun. And some more outlandish theories exist. Many feel because of the manpower and material used that aliens erected the pyramids so they could find their way back to Earth by leaving a mark they could see from the sky, sort of like breadcrumbs on a trail.

The pyramids in ancient Egypt and the pre-Columbian cultures of Central America and Mexico were built as ceremonial structures and burial chambers. But no mystery or ceremonial purpose surrounds our version of those ancient icons. The Pyramid at Cal State Long Beach was erected in the fall of 1994 in an attempt to build a larger sporting facility for a student population that ballooned from 5,000 in the '50s to 30,000 in the '70s.

Architect and CSULB alumnus Don Gibbs designed The Pyramid, which measures 345 feet on each of its four sides. The building had a construction budget of $22 million and was built by the Nielsen Construction Company of San Diego. Currently, it seats 5,000 with plans for a phased expansion that will eventually hold a crowd of 7,500.

The inside of The Pyramid has approximately 39,000 square feet of beechwood flooring; the exterior has 18,000 steel tubes and connection modules joined by more than 160,000 three-quarter-inch bolts. The base also features a modern fitness center known as Frog's Club One and a state-of the-art educational conferences center called The Pointe.

*- Alex Roman*

# University Calendar

## Music

**March 2,** Freddie Brooks; Sean Lane; Sue Foley. Blue Café. Info: (562) 983-7111.
**March 3,** Faculty Artist Series: Valentina Gottlieb, Piano, Daniel Recital Hall. Info: (562) 985-4364.
**March 6,** The Music Guild Presents the Osiris Piano Trio from Amsterdam, Daniel Recital Hall. Info: (310) 552-3030.
**March 7,** Woodwind Chamber Concert with John Barcellona, conductor, Daniel Recital Hall. Info: (562) 985-4364.
**March 7,** Long Beach Symphony Orchestra Classics Concert V, Terrace Theater. Info: (562) 436-3203.
**March 10,** Faculty Artist Series: Jenny Showalter, Clarinet, Daniel Recital Hall. Info: (562) 985-4364.
**March 16,** Vocal Jazz I with Connaitre Miller, director, Daniel Recital Hall. Info: (562) 985-4364.
**March 17,** Mama's Boys; Max Bangwell; Joey K & the Extra Double; Steve Copeland & Raging Sun. Blue Café. Info: (562) 983-7111.
**March 18,** Celebrating Music XI: "Carmina Burana," Carpenter Performing Arts Center.
Info: (562) 985-7000.



Photo by Matt Lankes

Sue Foley will appear at the Blue Café in Long Beach March 2.



Photo by Jay Strauss

Legendary jazz trumpeter Arturo Sandoval will perform with his band at the Carpenter Performing Arts Center March 23.

**March 19,** Faculty Artist Series: Steven Morgan, Bassoon, Daniel Recital Hall. Info: (562) 985-4364.
**March 22,** Symphonic Band Concert with Leo Potts, conductor, Daniel Recital Hall. Info: (562) 985-4364.
**March 23,** Jazz trumpeter Arturo Sandoval and his band, Carpenter Performing Arts Center. Info: (562) 985-7000.
**March 23,** Faculty Artist Series: Mark Uranker, Piano, Daniel Recital Hall. Info: (562) 985-4364.
**March 24,** Contemporary folk musician Tom Chapin, Carpenter Performing Arts Center. Info: (562) 985-7000.
**March 24,** Faculty Artist Series: Chamber Music, Daniel Recital Hall. Info: (562) 985-4364.
**March 26,** The Fabulous Tuscaderos plus Clone L.A. (with Paula from the Angoras), Blue Café. Info: (562) 983-7111.
**March 26,** New Music Ensemble with Martin Herman, director, Daniel Recital Hall. Info: (562) 985-4364.
**March 27,** The Music Guild Presents the Parish String Quartet from Paris, Daniel Recital Hall. Info: (310) 552-3030.

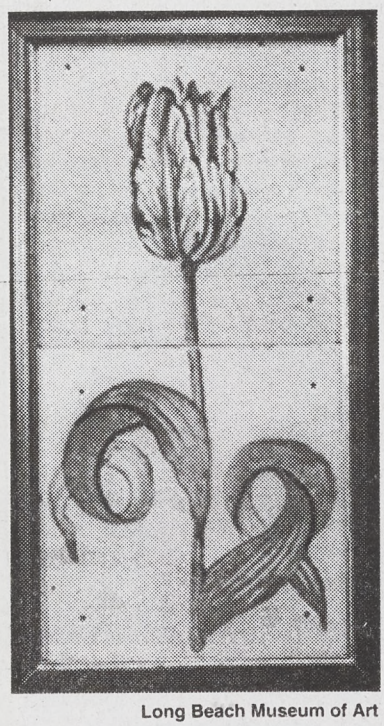


Photo by Yves Dub'e

Les Deux Mondes will perform *Tale of Teeka* at the Carpenter Performing Arts Center March 31.

# Theater

**March 2-24,** "Streamers," by David Rabe, Players 2nd Stage Theatre, CSULB Theatre Arts Building. Info: (562) 985-5526.
**Continuing until March 3,** "Mrs. Warren's Profession," Long Beach Playhouse Studio. Info: (562) 494-1616.
**Continuing until March 11,** "Swinging on a Star," International City Theatre at the Performing Arts Center. Info: (562) 494-4595.
**Continuing until March 24,** "A Murder is Announced," Long Beach Playhouse Mainstage. Info: (562) 494-1616.
**March 30 - May 12,** "The Nerd," Long Beach Playhouse Mainstage. Info: (562) 494-1616.
**March 31,** *Les Deux Mondes: The Tale of Teeka*, Carpenter Performing Arts Center. Info: (562) 985-7000.



Long Beach Museum of Art

*From Tulips, Pomegranates and Kings: Delftware from the collection of Benjamin F. Edwards III* at the Long Beach Museum of Art.

# Performing Arts

**March 9-31,** "A Piece of My Heart," by Shirley Lauro, Players 2nd Stage Theatre, CSULB Theatre Arts Building. Info: (562) 985-5526.
**Continuing until March 17,** "L'Histoire Du Soldat," California Repertory Company at the Edison Theatre. Info: (562) 432-1818.
**March 22-25,** The CSULB Contemporary Dance Concert, Martha Knoebel Dance Theatre. Info: (562) 985-4747.

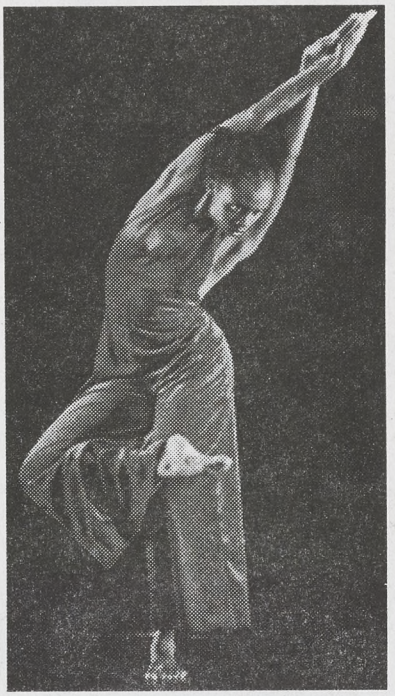


Photo by Keith Ian Polakoff

# Art

**Continuing until March 11,** "Double Vision: Photographs from the Strauss Collection," University Art Museum. Info: (562) 985-5761.
**March 27 – April 29,** "Catherine Chalmers: Prey and Eat," University Art Museum. Info: (562) 985-5761.
**March 27 – April 29,** "19+1+1" new works of the University Art Museum's permanent collection. Info: (562) 985-5761.
**Continuing until April 15,** "Francisco Toledo: Recent Works on Paper, 1999-2000," Museum of Latin American Art. Info: (562) 437-1689.
**Continuing until April 22,** "Tulips, Pomegranates & Kings: Delftware from the Collection of Benjamin F. Edwards, III," Long Beach Museum of Art. Info: (562) 439-2119.

# University Perspective

## STACEY ATCHLEY, COMMUNITY RELATIONS COORDINATOR, UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM



**Q:** What's coming up at the University Art Museum?

**A:** We've got a lot of exciting programs coming up this spring at the UAM. Beginning March 27, we have an exhibition called *Catherine Chalmers: Prey and Eat.* She's an up-and-coming artist and this is her first solo West Coast museum show. The UAM has a tradition of bringing to the attention of the community artists who haven't necessarily been seen in this area.

She's an artist who takes pictures of animals in predator/prey situations, which she manipulates. They're extremely large photographs and the scenes are set against a really stark white background, so the images really pop out and make a huge impact on the viewer. Some of the images might not be appropriate for younger children or sensitive viewers, but it's an interesting take on nature.

We also have publications from most of the exhibitions that we've had in the past. What we've done recently is to create a reading room where we've displayed a lot of those publications. So students and faculty are welcome to come in and browse through the books. Some of them are available to purchase and others are for reference only. They're also a really good resource for anyone who wants to learn more about art, particularly contemporary art. That is our specialty.

## TORI TIBBETTS, SENIOR, PSYCHOLOGY

**Q:** What do you think of the diversity on campus?

**A:** I think that there is good diversity on campus, but I also think that there is a lot of segregation among the groups. It seems as if all the groups tend to stick together. I'm not really sure why, but I don't think that the campus does enough to encourage intermingling between the cultures. When you're walking through campus, you just seem



to notice where all the different groups hang out. It doesn't make me uncomfortable, but I could see how it would make someone that's maybe new on campus uncomfortable.

I think that this is a huge problem, especially in the world that we live in. We're in California where it's essentially a tossed salad. I also think that it's a problem because when you get into the real world you're going to have to deal with every ethnicity. You will have to learn to be able to deal with different people and understand where they come from. I mean, ethnicity shouldn't have to be such a big factor, but it looks like it is, by the way people are grouped on campus. I guess it might be comfortable for people to stick close to their own, so to speak, but you won't be able to do that forever.

## BONNIE SINTUVAT, SOPHMORE, COMMUNICATIONS, PRESIDENT OF THE CHINESE AMERICAN STUDENT ASSOCIATION (CASA)

**Q:** What makes culture-based student groups important to have on campus?

**A:** Some people need to find identity on campus, because a lot of people are shy. So it acts as an opening for people who don't know what to do first on campus. This is a really big campus and it's hard to make friends, and, at least in our club, we welcome everyone, and if anyone needs help, we try to help them as much as possible. We just try to create a family on campus. As for our association, we're going to get together this spring and take part in the Chinese Heritage Festival. So not only do you get a chance to meet other people on campus, but also people on other campuses with the same interests.

Culture groups try to include everyone as much as possible. Nothing serious, we don't want to be serious. You know a lot of people come to school and have enough on their mind about school. We just want people to come to our meetings or our events to have fun. We're trying to appeal to those who feel kind of lost in large organizations; they tend to be more like a part than a whole section of the group that they're in. So we try to round everyone up and get to know them on a personal level.



*Compilation and Photography by Alex Roman*

## Dancers and choreographers from CSULB share their talents at a dance festival in Albuquerque



# Dancers create paths for life

**By Alexandria Sullivan**

Christie Freeman started dancing at 13. She cleaned the floors at a dance studio with her mother where she received free lessons. From that point she never stopped and will graduate this year with a degree in dance.

For any artist, hard work is a part of the package. Pursuing a dream takes time, effort and the ability to deal with a lot of disappointment. The rewards come when the dancer's efforts and talent are recognized. Festivals that showcase a dancer's creative work are very important. They allow a dancer to see others' work and to be seen outside of their college.

Three of the 10 dances in this year's undergraduate contemporary spring concert have been selected to go to the American College Dance Festival in Albuquerque, N.M., in March. These choreographers and performers will represent Cal State Long Beach at the Festival, and Freeman's piece is a part.

The festival brings dancers together to showcase their work. The festival is a great way for choreographers and dancers to share ideas. Although the pieces are judged by three nationally recognized choreographers and performers, the environment at this festival is more about sharing than competition, according to Doug Nielson, producer of the CSULB dance concert and an instructor in the dance department.

Christie Freeman's "Not Macabre" is one of the dances that will be presented. Freeman choreographed the piece, an ensemble of 10 women. The dancers use their own voices, incorporating sighs and groans as accompaniment to the piece, which Nielson calls refreshing.

"Not Macabre" is unusual because it mimics the music, Nielsen says. Freeman does this by putting a dance step in every beat. The music and the dance steps work together, instead of being independent.

"It's a guaranteed good time," Freeman says, explaining how the piece is playful and made to make people laugh–different from the dramatic and serious dances Freeman has typically created.

"Watching dance is like a conversation with somebody," Freeman says. "It's the listening part not the talking part–think of listening to the movement instead of watching it."

Freeman's advice is good for those who may not understand what a choreographer is doing with a piece. Instead, they can think of how the dance makes them feel.

"Audiences can appreciate dance as a human art form," Nielson says. "They can identify with the body."

Another piece chosen to represent the CSULB dance department is "Desires End." Sarandon Cassidy, a dance minor, choreographed the piece.

Cassidy is a feminist and wanted to celebrate women's roles in society. She explains that the dresses in her piece are silky and light but the dancers are doing movement that is rough with a lot of floor work.

"Even though they are wearing dresses they get the job done," Cassidy says. Each of the four women has different body types, which show how different bodies can move.

Both choreographers are excited about attending the festival. "This is like the biggest thing–I smiled all week long," Cassidy says.

"To actually go take classes with all these people, people that are your age, going through the same thing, experiencing the same experience," Freeman says. "Watching them perform at night, it's really a lot of good energy."

Another piece going to the festival is "Me, Myself & She," choreographed by Jennifer DeBritten and Jessica Humphrey, but the piece will not be among those to be judged.

Sometimes dreams disappoint us, and sometimes they surprise us. The point is dreams make us more human. Dreams push us out of being just a body into having a soul. These dancers are on their way to pursuing their goals. They have taken a step toward being recognized as accomplished dancers.

The festival runs March 7 to 10 in Albuquerque, and the Contemporary Dance Concert runs March 22 to 25 at CSULB. It will include "Not Macabre," "Desires end," and "Me, Myself & She," along with dances from other undergraduate students.

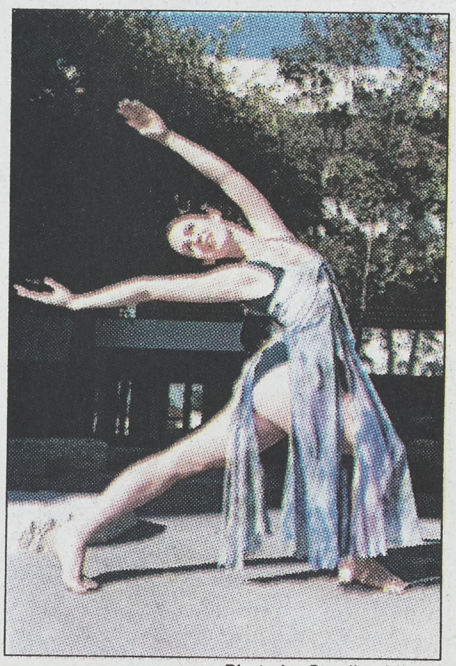


Photo by Caroline Limuti

Christie Freeman will showcase her work at the American College Dance Fesitval in Alberquerque, N.M.

# HIP

*Dance, for some, symbolizes slow and graceful movements to a classical sonata, while others prefer a salsa or the wall-shaking vibration of a heavy bass line. From this, a new dance group fuses these siblings of style.*

**By Desi Molinar**
**Photos by Caroline Limuti**



The hip-hop dance troupe, Existention. Clockwise from top left: Dallas Puth, Kiki Lewis, Nicole Holst, Nicole Monaghan, Daniel Dennison, Nicholas Pielaat, Whitney Prenger, Alicia Johnson and Roshellie Cotton.

Ballet bars line the mirrored walls of a dance room, right above a small pile of pink lint that might have fallen from a tutu. And if you position yourself just right, you can almost hear a Mozart sonata echoing through stretched tendons.

On this particular evening, if you place your ear to the wooden floor, eroded clean of grain marks from the constant sweeping of slippers, you hear the stomping thud of sneakers back-beating to a different drum.

Existention, a hip-hop dance troupe at Cal State Long Beach, has just walked through the door. In minutes, the room is transformed from Pointe 101 to Soul Train after-hours.

Rushing in from class or work, toned legs impatiently wait as arms quickly peel off pit-stained conservative clothes and reveal more breathable fabric–spandex, Lycra and sagging cargo pants. Anything goes when you're a member of CSULB's only hip-hop dance club.

Last semester, on his way to an architecture class, Nick Pielaat saw a sign that 50 others also saw that same morning: "Wanna Dance Like Britney Spears and N'Sync? Try-Out for the New Hip-Hop Dance Club." A little worried since his amateur rug-cutting experience was limited to club outings and family reunions, he put on dancing shoes and auditioned nevertheless.

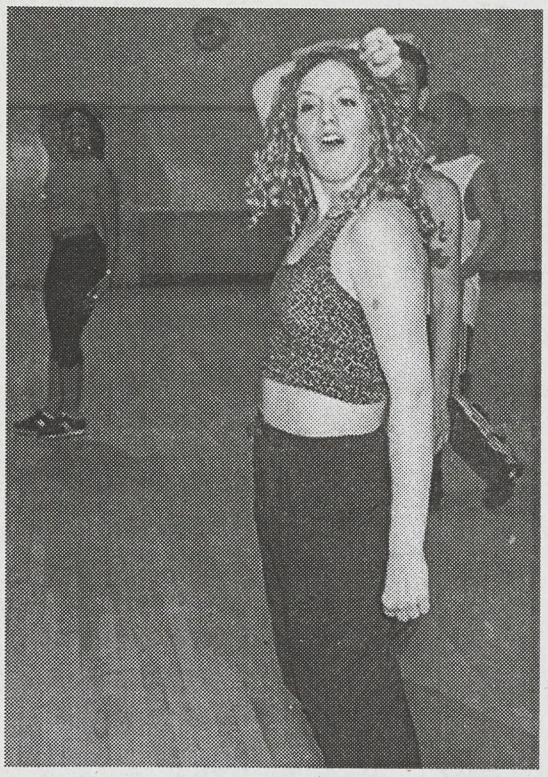
He and 14 others made the cut, becoming the founding members of Existention, the dance troupe that took its name from a philosophical movement revolving around the individual and freedom. Here you will find ice-skaters pumping shoulders next to basketball players and business majors without missing a synchronized beat in their gravity-defying acrobatics, little moons contributing their own rotations while revolving around a common source: music.

Co-founders Nicole Holst and Dallas Puth were not officially freshmen when the idea of starting a dance club was leaping and twisting in their heads.

"We met in the summer for a University 100 class and discovered we both liked to dance," says Puth, who bears a strong resemblance to a handjivin' Danny Zuko. "But there were no hip-hop organizations that we knew of on campus."

Andy Vaca, faculty advisor for the CSULB dance department, was impressed by the strong initiative students took to create the group.

"Nicole was excited, enthusiastic and came in



Nicole Holst rehearses with her hip hop partners.

with an idea to fill a gap," Vaca says. "She did what every creative student does–instead of griping, do something about it."

# HOP

The club has just finished their opening "minutes." Holst gave an overview of spring performance dates– basketball halftimes and talent-show fundraisers – and encouraged the dancers to "move with more attitude."

The hip-hoppers spring up for their warm-up, helping each other stretch their legs in positions and lengths that would make the gum of a teeny-bopper jealous. They follow their president's pops and rolls, imitating her sharp shoulder sways, perfecting their posture.

All choreography is original.

"I don't even have MTV," Holst says, "so I can't steal stuff."

It is Monday night and the team is rehearsing a combination it learned Friday. A weekend is a long time to go without seeing each other. Nicole "Neeko" Monaghan, a freshman communications major, leans against Pielaat, whom she affectionately refers to as "Nicky-poo," for support while playing with her bellybutton ring.

"From the very first day, we all got along," Monaghan says. "We're supposed to have a sleepover soon."

"Kiki" Lewis, a sophomore business major, has brought a friend to balance the guy-girl ratio. Everyone welcomes Melvin Turner with the affection of a twelve-step group, and he immediately must learn by immersion a routine of which he already has missed half.

Biceps, triceps and oh-my-ceps are cadenced into sharp, clean movements that have been disciplined to perfection over the weekend. Lithe girls then join the spotlight, complementing the masculine robotics with feminine hip sways only an Eve's anatomy could master.

"Stick your butt up!" Holst says.

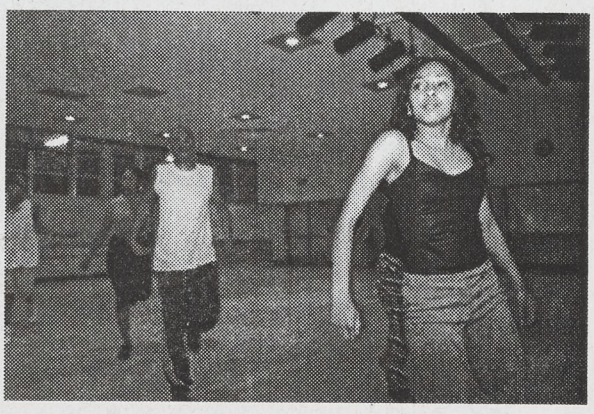
Newboy-Turner is getting the hang of things, adding his own touch to the little Riverdance kicks that occur in the bridge of Mya's song.

Melvin.

You say it out loud and know the name his mother christened him with is not going to last long. In a week it will probably be Elvy, Mo-Mel or some other hip moniker of "J-Lo" caliber.

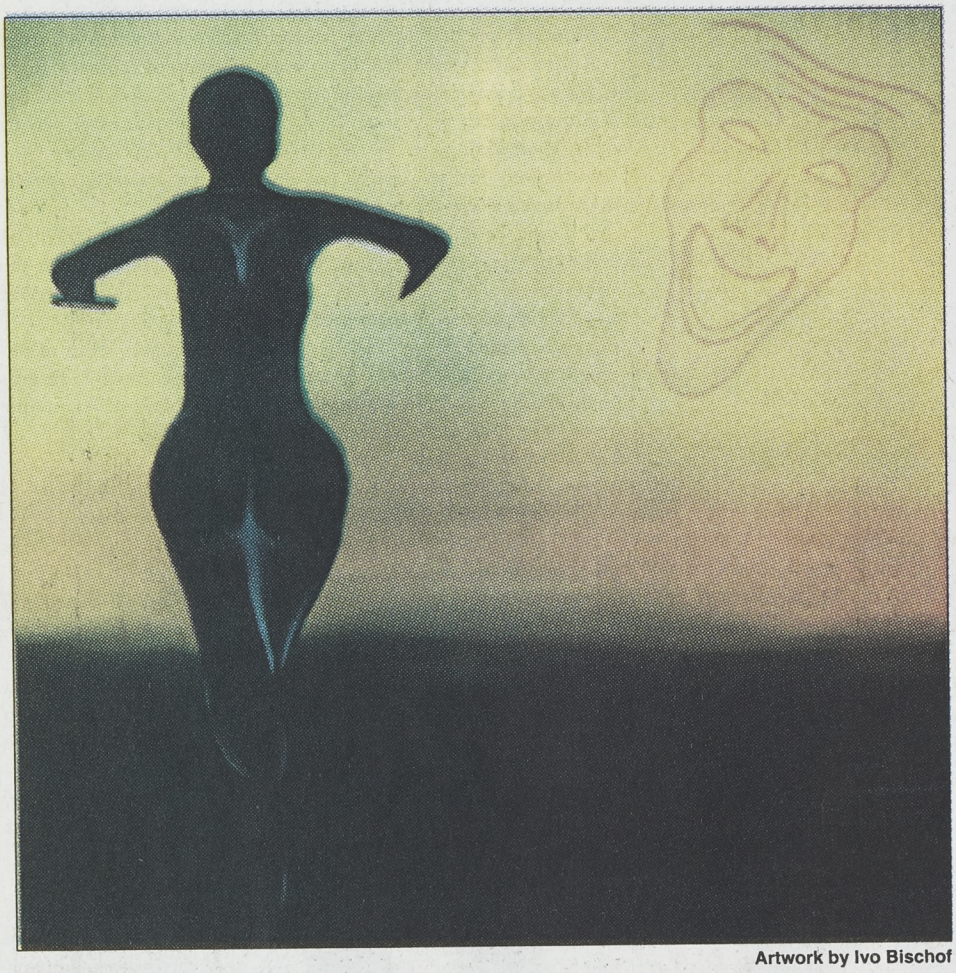
Fluorescent lamps suffer from the recent energy crisis and flicker into a strobe-like glow. The club refuses to end early and it dances on, lights or no lights. Passers-by from the swim team stop and loiter near the door. The broken lights have given the dancers a concert-like atmosphere, with blinking special effects enhancing the "attitude."

After two hours of nonstop movement, the dancers finally take a break. They drink their water and stretch on the ballet bars. Out of nowhere, someone breaks into a hum and the rest join in, clapping hands and bobbing heads to a tune from an invisible band. Maybe it's a song for one of their routines. Maybe it's Mozart.



Roshellie Cotton feels the beat.

# A theater department faces change



Artwork by Ivo Bischof

**While many departments at Cal State Long Beach have changed and grown in the past 50 years, few have developed as "dramatically" as that of theatre arts.**

**By Chan Tran**
**Photos by Caroline Limuti**

Walking in, you're greeted with the memories of famous people who have walked the same halls as you. Agnes DeMille had wandered through these doors, the Royal Shakespeare Theatre actors have also treaded here along with a pre-Star Trek Patrick Stewart.

As one girl in tights rushes by you, another boy comes in holding a stack of papers resembling a term paper while running his hands through his hair, wondering why he can't get the dialect correct.

He turns and asks if you need help, leaving you to wonder if you've entered a low-key high school musical or the rehearsal of a Broadway show.

## Growing from meager beginnings

The Cal State Long Beach theater arts department, nestled in the upper corner of campus, has stood firm for five decades as an artistic and creative establishment for teachers, students and the community. It started in the 1950s as an undergraduate program in the speech department.

"It was one great big wonderful family," says Lou Pass, remembering the early days of the program and the enthusiasm of the time. Pass was the first department secretary and would eventually remain so for 30 years, surpassing three different chairmen. She remembers when the department did not have a central location.

"Our classes were scattered all over the place," Pass says. "Since the theater classes were generally noisy, we couldn't go into certain classrooms because we were too rowdy."

By the 1960s the department had abandoned its speech ties and transformed into the drama department within the Little Theatre.

"[But] when they had parties it was still the speech department," says Ken Rugg, a drama teacher who started in 1963. Rugg helped supervise student directors and actors for three decades before retiring for a second time in 1994.

When Rugg started, a WWII army structure by the engineering department became a stage on which plays were produced. The theater seated 100 people and the stage was on a concrete floor, according to Rugg. Students would often rehearse on the grass. All semester long, 21 professors would help student directors mount short plays–every week a new show.

"We had to haul stuff up and down the hill all the time, back and forth," Rugg says. "Things would get stolen every once in a while."

## An expanding program faces challenges

A new theater building was built in 1970 and opened in the fall of '72 thanks to a hard-working committee of dedicated professors and administrators. The department office was also established. The first production in the new building was "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," but the first actual production was "An Italian Straw Hat," in 1974.

The theater department finally had a full department building, bringing a closeness that was lacking when the students were vagabonds on campus.

"The best time was in the '70s because it was new," says Mark Abel, a performing arts technician who came to CSULB in 1970. "There was more cohesion with the cast and the crew of the productions in the '70s. Also, the

*"There's been a huge shift away from realism in the theater where it doesn't pretend to be anything other than a spectacle."*

productions usually ran for one week as opposed to the three-week productions of today."

Throughout the years, and all the faculty and staff changes, the most significant change has been the expansion of the master's program and the advent of Cal Rep in the late '80s.

With the addition of the graduate program, which included Cal Rep, there have been different viewpoints about the benefits and detriment of the program as well as the atmosphere and future of the department.

Cal Rep started in 1989 in what is now the Player's Theatre. Prior to that it was called the Directing Lab, where directing classes were held. When the MFA program was initiated, part of the package was bringing in a professional group. With Cal Rep, the idea was to give the graduate actor experience in working with professionals mainly so that the department could have a special contract with the union to hire equity actors for less money than it would usually cost. The actors would then work in production with student actors on campus.

"The thing is that they have shortchanged the undergraduate program and the graduate is a vanity theater," Rugg says.

Howard Burman, the department chair since 1988, feels differently.

"Most schools will put the undergraduate and graduate programs together. We separate the two," Burman says. "The department has two distinct sets of goals. We believe this is the best way."

The graduate program offers the best possible, professional-model theater by constantly attempting new works. "We're not in the entertainment business, we're in the arts," Burman says. "We do plays that make and challenge the audience."

The program also tries to bring in international talents.

## Some in-house tension but no competition

Aside for the prominence of the master's program, undergraduates receive a broad base liberal arts education. The undergraduates perform a wide variety of plays including medieval, Greek and contemporary. It offers a range of all styles for beginning students eager to learn what they would like to concentrate on.

"We have separated those two completely so that the undergraduates do not have to compete with graduates for roles," Burman says. "We want to offer the undergraduates all the opportunity to not have to compete with the graduates. The average age range for graduate students are in the '40s so there's a big difference in experience. Also, we have never, never ever put undergrads in a graduate production and vice versa."

Pass feels it was something that the faculty wanted at the time.

"We had this wonderful undergrad program, but we didn't have too hot of a credential program," Pass says. "Having a professional master's program was the next step. It was not the intent of the faculty at the time to shortchange the undergraduate program."

Still, Rugg feels that the atmosphere of the department is uncertainty and that they have lost sight of what past faculty had put in place.

## A prestigious establishment

As the department stays alive artistically, it has fallen behind the technological advances in 21st century equipment.

The department needs more funds to upgrade its lighting and stage equipments. The University Theatre is now 27 years old and was last refurbished in 1977. The stages need new lighting systems, while most of the furniture is from the '70s.

For Burman, the goal is to have a stronger national reputation; in the same league as the South Coast Repertory or Mark Taper Forum. He would like to have more money to bring in nationally recognized artists. The fear is that the contemporary theater cannot match with other media.

"Television and film have taken over the realistic forms of theater," Burman says. "There's been a huge shift away from realism in the theater where it doesn't pretend to be anything other than a spectacle. For the stage to look like something real it loses the audience."

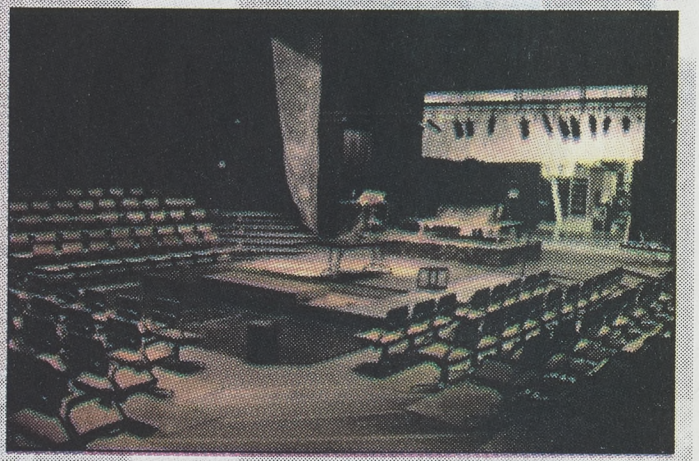
The accomplishment of the department still speaks for itself. CSULB's theatre department has the only fully operating MFA program in the CSU system. It also has the only off-campus theater, the Edison Theatre in downtown Long Beach.

After five decades, you still find students rehearsing until late at night. There is a sense of closeness and camaraderie, much like athletes who put in long hours to be the best. Those who exit the front door, whether famous or unknown, students or faculty, remain in one collective family among the different stages of the real world.

"In the years that I was there, it was my family–my extended family," Pass says. "It still is today."



Mark Abel, a performing arts technician, has seen many changes since joining the department in 1970.



The main stage in the CSULB theater department.

# Who wouldn't adopt these orphans?

By Melissa Leach
Photos by Katie Gahagan





The Orphans perform as part of the theater department's weekly presentation.

Imagine yourself onstage, lights blinding your eyes, sweat trickling down your forehead. You have no idea what the next moment holds. You rely solely on your quick wit and mind, trusting completely the people onstage beside you. Then there is the audience: silent, waiting for you to supply them with entertainment, waiting for you to make them laugh.

This may sound like a really bad dream, one where you wake up in panic only to realize that you're safe in bed. While most of us are petrified of speaking in front of an audience, some are quite the opposite. Some actually thrive on this kind of torture. They are called actors–improvisational actors.

Improvisation is the art of extemporizing. Many will recognize improvisation because of the popular television show *Whose Line is it Anyway?* on ABC. Here on the Cal State Long Beach campus we have our own exceedingly funny, and talented, troupe known as The Orphans.

Senior theater major David Escobedo started The Orphans five years ago in Escondido. Two years ago he started another branch in Long Beach, handpicking the troupe that has performed at the Hollywood Ha Ha Festival, The Comedy Store and the Rock Bottom Brewery, among others.

"The Orphans have hit some rough times," Escobedo says. "But, the hardships have fallen by the wayside, and what stands before you is one of the most talented, entertaining troupes ever created."



The Orphans improvise a "classroom" sketch.

While movies and television are passive, theater audiences can change and influence the performance. In fact, the performance changes each night. Audience participation is a key to improv, and Escobedo's desire is to bring the audience into the moment instead of just being a passenger.

Escobedo believes that improv is essential for theater to exist–placing the actor in the moment. He believes most theater majors need to make the audience a priority and be responsive to it. The Orphans are trying to make the theater experience enjoyable for all.

> *"I see improv as a way to reach out to people who are afraid of theater, and I can touch them, and make them laugh ... hopefully."*

In the 1920s and '30s Viola Spolin essentially created what we know today as improv. She thought her students would enjoy acting if it were presented as a series of games. There are two major forms of improvisation: short form and long form. For example, *Who's Line is it Anyway?* is considered short form. *Saturday Night Live* and the movie *Magnolia* are considered long form. The Orphans use the short form.

Before performing in TA 2426 at the showcase room in the theater department, the troupe is crackling with electricity. Eating Lemonheads and soup with crackers, troupe members are bursting with energy. They perform the show in a school format, playing an improv game in each "class." In one game, the audience comes up with a sentence, "Cajoling a hemophiliac during a Godzilla attack." One player goes out of the room and when the sentences are compiled the others try to perform the sentence for him without using words, while he guesses what they are doing. This is just one of many hilarious games used during a performance.

While The Orphans are not censored and will use profanity and sexual content, but they don't rely on these things. Every skit the group performs includes the audience, which on many occasions is like playing with matches. The troupe consists of nine other highly talented individuals, each bringing their own brand of comedy.

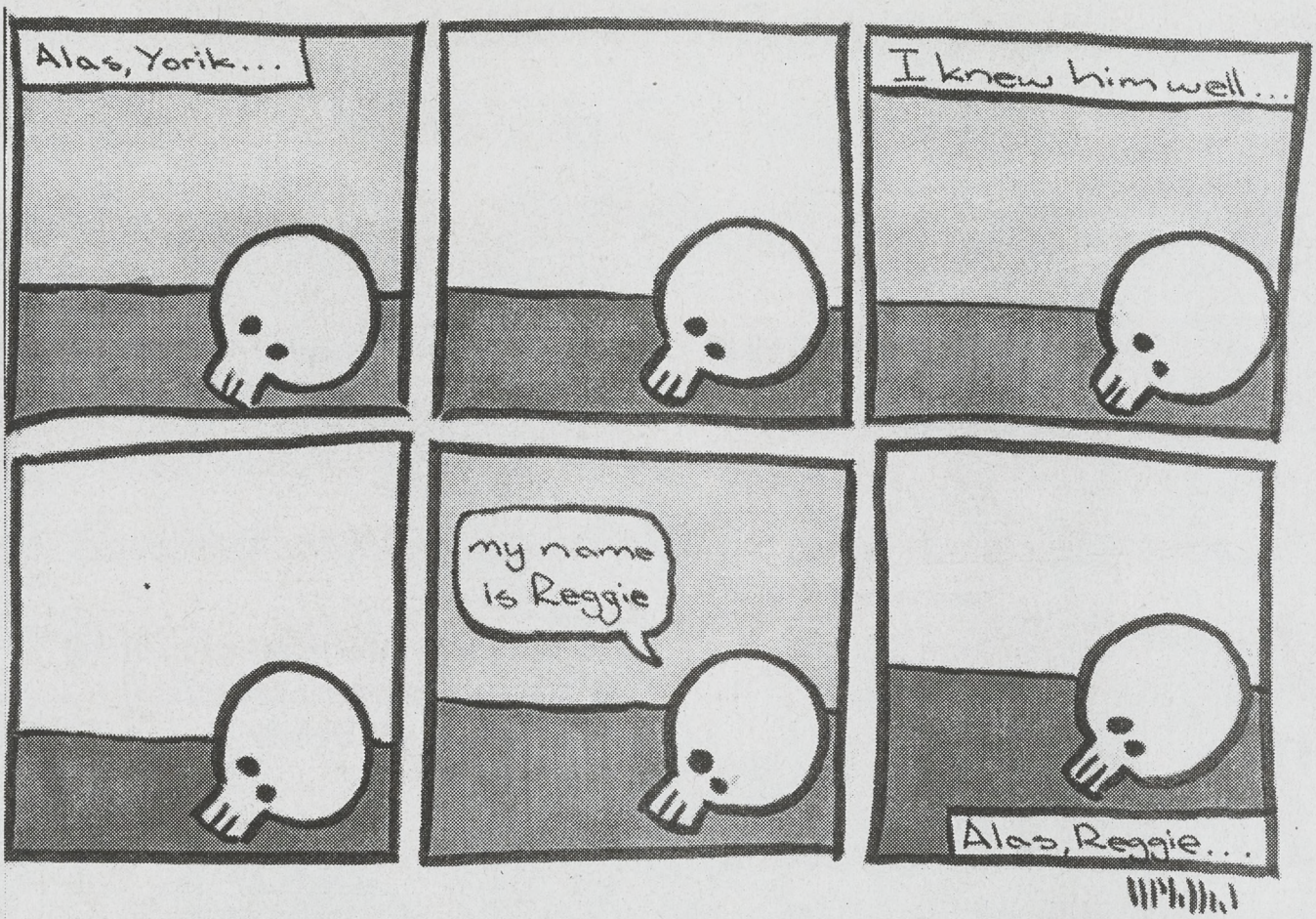
Brian Kapell is one of the co-founders of Comedysportz, a nationally acclaimed improv organization in Madison, Wis. He joins Jason Weissbrod, a junior who is responsible for the format of the group. Phil Van Hest, a senior, has been in a number of productions, and freshman Andrea Fornica brings with her a positive attitude.

Other members include Katie Lamberton, Katie Johnson and Karla Suarez, who helped begin the Long Beach branch of The Orphans.

"I see improv as a way to reach out to people who are afraid of theater, and I can touch them, and make them laugh . . . hopefully," Fornica says.

"The Orphans," vows Escobedo, "will continue to be the source for new games and new entertainment . . . as long as we both shall live."

## Hamlet's Lament




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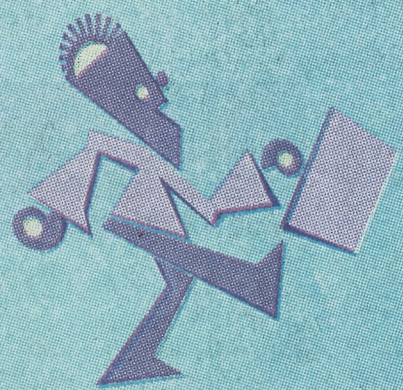
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